Book Review: Misogyny: The male malady

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David D. Gilmore, *Misogyny: The Male Malady*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001. 253 pp. (inc. index). ISBN 0–8122–3589–4 (hbk), $26.50

Anthropologist David Gilmore argues in *Misogyny: The Male Malady*, that men have a 'nearly universal' fear of women, which they express through public, institutionalized and ritualized exhibitions of hatred. This geographically and chronologically widespread hatred is the result of psychological anxiety, not an attempt to control women or create conditions of systematic inequality. The first three chapters are a compendium of forms of misogyny in New Guinea, North and South America, Europe and Asia. Africa is notably absent. There is ample material detailing male disgust of menstruation, pregnancy, female nurturing and sexuality. The evidence for his argument comes from a broad range of sources, including ethnography, sociology, literature, art, music, psychology, philosophy and folklore. Surprisingly, the author does little to problematize categories of 'primitive', 'modern', 'civilized' and 'preliterate'. The other chapters in the book consider how anthropologists, psychologists, feminists, Marxists and other scholars have attempted to theorize misogyny. Most of the ethnography does little to advance beyond early studies, which are informed by social-evolutionist frameworks. He adds no original ethnographic material, but his chapter on psychological theories is the most lucid and interesting and it would have been better to place it at the beginning of the book. His book is focused on men as a universal, essentialized group. Just as men are an essential group, the only emotions they seem to have are hatred and anger. This view is modified when he introduces 'gynophilia': a neologism he coins to describe an '[o]vervaluation' of women, which co-exists with misogyny and ambivalence' (p. 181).

As a sign of men's profound inner struggle, misogyny is at '[l]east partly psychogenic in origin, a result of identical experiences in the male developmental cycle, rather than caused by the environment alone' (p. xiii). Gilmore searches for a 'cause' for men's psychological damage; since he claims that it comes from the 'male development cycle' and without stating it openly, the unspoken word is 'mother'. From this standpoint, the universality of misogyny is logical, since 'everyone' can claim to have had a biological, adoptive or even an absent 'mother' figure. He does not carry his work to this logical conclusion: that women are to blame for men's hatred of women. Rather, his work on misogyny is itself misogynistic; women are passive and voiceless, victims of the violence and hatred being directed at them and the subtext is clear: they are also the source of the problem.

Despite the pre-eminence of psychological explanations, Gilmore critiques psychologists for their emphasis on the Oedipal complex, castration anxiety and '[p]sychic ambivalence (love-hate) as the main affective

ingredient' (p. 11). He demonstrates that he is highly influenced by these theories; the themes of castration anxiety, the Oedipal complex and a confused mixture of the love/lust and hate that men have for women are repeated in each chapter. A fundamental problem is that psychologists work with individuals and Gilmore inserts a sweeping analysis of whole societies in their place. The era when anthropologists could make vast generalizations comfortably and characterize a whole gender by psychological 'type' is long past. It is true, as he says, that a goal of anthropology is to be comparative, but another goal is holism. Additionally, anthropologists study how people *make* culture and not merely how they are victims of it.

Another serious problem is that men are real and have 'real' psychological problems, but women are representations. In Gilmore's discussions, these representations begin to stand in for actual women. Clearly, some have asked what response women give to misogyny. He asks: 'Do women return the favor by hating men and inventing magical dangers? The answer seems to be a resounding no' (p. 12). He argues that women do not have a 'popular' term for describing their hatred of men, which might cause the reader to raise an eyebrow. He insists that female expressions of hatred must be 'institutionalized' to be recognized. He does not consider that men, especially in the ethnographic and historical examples he presents, control public institutions, literary forms and expressions of power. The absence of female voices in political, cultural and economic institutions is not 'evidence' that women do not have thoughts or take actions, which resist, undercut or undermine male oppression. He simply has not considered sources in which women have a voice. Furthermore, there must be some kind of response: is it silence? Are women intentionally tormenting men? Are these 'representations' facts? These are some of the logical directions that his work takes.

The weaknesses stem from Gilmore's refusal to consider gender as a social and cultural construction, not as an essential, unchanging 'fact'. The strength is in the range of sources, but the methods and types of material are unproblematized. The bulk of 'evidence' is from older ethnographic studies, the theoretical foundations, methods and intellectual frameworks of which have been thoroughly critiqued in anthropology over the past 20 years. If the category of gender were opened, his thesis would fall apart because 'men' would no longer be an essentialized, psychologically distressed, one-dimensional character and women would actually exist; they would not merely be a sign or a symptom of a 'male malady'.

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